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Environment and sustainable development

Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa

Report of the Secretary-General**

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 54/223, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its fifty-fifth session on the implementation of that resolution and on the outcome of the third session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa.

II. Implementation of General Assembly resolution 54/223

A. Headquarters agreement

2. The agreement concerning the headquarters of the Convention secretariat was signed by the Government of Germany, the United Nations and the Convention's secretariat on 18 August 1998. The Government of Germany had issued an ordinance, which became effective on 23 October 1998, implementing major parts of the headquarters agreement under German law, and on 8 July 1999 the headquarters agreement entered into force (ICCD/COP(3)/8).

3. The Conference of the Parties, at its third session, noted with satisfaction that the headquarters agreement had entered into force and expressed its appreciation to the Government of Germany for its commitment to facilitating the establishment of the Convention secretariat in Bonn.

B. Programme and budget for the biennium 2000-2001

4. The Conference of the Parties considered the programme budget proposed by the Executive Secretary for the biennium 2000-2001 (ICCD/COP(3)/2 and Add.1), the report on the financial performance of the Convention budget for 1999 (ICCD/COP(3)/4 and Add.1 and 2), and the report on the status of the trust funds in 1999 (ICCD/COP(3)/3 and Add.1).

5. The Conference of the Parties approved the Convention core budget for the biennium 2000-2001,

* A/55/150.

** The footnote requested by the General Assembly in resolution 54/248 as to why a report is submitted late was not provided.

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including the budget line for the Global Mechanism to the Convention. The Conference of the Parties did not, however, include provisions for its conference-servicing costs on those of its subsidiary bodies, on the understanding that the General Assembly had acceded to the request of the Conference to pay for those costs. It should be recalled in that regard that the General Assembly decided in paragraph 18 of resolution 54/223 to "... include in the calendar of conferences and meetings for the biennium 2000-2001 the sessions of the Conference of the Parties and its subsidiary bodies, including the fourth and fifth ordinary sessions of the Conference of the Parties and the meetings of its subsidiary bodies". The Conference of the Parties also adopted the indicative scale of contributions for 2000 and adjusted it insofar as it is based on the United Nations scale of assessment so as to ensure that no Party contributes less than 0.001 per cent of the total, that no one contribution exceeds 25 per cent of the total and that no contribution from any of the least developed countries exceeds 0.01 per cent of the total.

C. Consideration of reports on implementation of the Convention

6. Following the adoption of decisions 10/COP.1 and 10/COP.2 on review of the implementation of the Convention and decision 11/COP.1 on procedures for the communication of information and review of implementation, the Conference of the Parties at its third session considered reports submitted by affected African country Parties, subregional organizations, developed country Parties, United Nations organizations, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations on the implementation of the Convention, and the compilation and synthesis of those reports by the secretariat.

7. Over 40 reports were submitted by African countries, reflecting the high level of priority given by the African region to the Convention implementation process. Accordingly, the Conference of the Parties welcomed the progress made in affected African country Parties, demonstrating the considerable range of activities and efforts, particularly in the elaboration, adoption and implementation of action programmes.

8. While addressing the subregional reports, the Conference of the Parties recognized the important role played by African subregional and regional organizations in the elaboration and implementation of national regional and subregional action programmes. It further recognized that the subregional and regional action programmes are potential tools for addressing sustainable management of transboundary natural resources and promoting initiatives where increased efficiency can be obtained through joint action.

9. The Conference of the Parties also appreciated the support provided by several developed country Parties for activities related to combating desertification and/or mitigating the effects of drought. However, it stressed the need to differentiate clearly the contributions allocated for combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought from other official development assistance. The Conference of the Parties called upon developed country Parties to improve their reports on measures taken to assist affected developing country Parties in the implementation of the Convention and to submit their reports in a timely fashion for consideration by the Conference of the Parties.

10. Regarding the reports submitted by the organizations of the United Nations system and by intergovernmental organizations, the Conference of the Parties recommended that the experience and lessons learned by the specialized agencies should be disseminated to all relevant forums and stressed the importance of the coordination of technical work between the specialized agencies and the secretariat.

11. The Conference of the Parties also expressed its appreciation for the reports and case studies presented by non-governmental organizations, essentially through the national report of the concerned country, on their activities in the implementation of action programmes, particularly national action programmes. The Conference of the Parties reaffirmed the special role and contribution of civil society in the formulation and implementation of measures to combat desertification.

D. Procedure for reviewing implementation of the Convention

12. In response to the remarkable number and quality of the reports submitted by the affected African country Parties, the Conference of the Parties decided to establish an ad hoc working group to review and analyse in depth, at its fourth session, reports submitted at its third session and reports that will be submitted at its fourth session, in order to draw conclusions and

propose concrete recommendations on further steps in implementation of the Convention.

13. Further, the Conference invited the Committee on Science and Technology and the Global Mechanism to provide advice and information to be used for reviewing the implementation of the Convention at its fourth session. The Conference also invited Parties and other interested institutions and organizations, including non-governmental organizations, to submit written proposals and suggestions on the need for the establishment of a committee to review the implementation of the Convention no later than 30 April 2000, to be compiled, summarized and circulated by the secretariat in order to develop further the existing review system and to facilitate consideration, and to take a decision on this issue at its fourth session and, if necessary, at its fifth session.

E. Global Mechanism: first review

14. The Conference of the Parties reaffirmed that the first priority for the Global Mechanism is to develop its operations as a demand-driven mechanism to facilitate the mobilization and channelling of substantial financial resources for the elaboration and implementation of action programmes, particularly national action programmes, projects and national reports. The Conference of the Parties underlined the necessity for the Global Mechanism to promote and facilitate multisource and multichannel financing for the implementation of the Convention by providing affected developing countries with practical and operational advice on linking the financing needs of action programmes with existing and potential sources of financing and facilitating the financing of national reports.

15. The Conference of the Parties also decided to give further consideration to the operational strategy of the Global Mechanism at its fourth session and requested the Managing Director to prepare a document in that regard based on comments, suggestions and proposals made during the third session and on written submissions by the Parties, received no later than 31 March 2000, and to submit that document for consideration and a compendium of submissions. Finally, the Conference of the Parties recommended that the Global Mechanism develop, as part of its operational strategy for consideration by the Conference at its fourth session, an information and communication strategy which will aim to facilitate contact with Parties and other actors, increase awareness of the Convention, and promote participation in its implementation.

F. Memorandum of understanding between the Conference of the Parties and the International Fund for Agricultural Development

16. The Conference of the Parties approved a revised draft memorandum of understanding between it and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) regarding the modalities and administrative operations of the Global Mechanism.

G. Recife Initiative

17. The Conference of the Parties underlined the necessity to formulate, for consideration and adoption at its fourth session, a declaration on the commitments under the Convention to enhance the implementation of the obligations defined in the Convention, to be called the Recife Initiative, or the Recife Declaration. The Conference of the Parties also agreed on the fact that the declaration should cover an agreed period and be focused on a limited number of specific thematic and sectoral areas to be consistent with action programmes under the Convention.

18. Accordingly, the Conference invited all Parties, relevant international organizations and non-governmental organizations to submit their written proposals and/or suggestions for the text of the declaration to the secretariat no later than 30 April 2000. Consequently, the Conference of the Parties requested the Executive Secretary to formulate a draft declaration and to circulate it, together with a compilation and a synthesis of proposals and/or suggestions, to all Parties at least eight weeks prior to its fourth session.

H. Additional regional implementation annex for Central and Eastern Europe

19. Following the adoption by the General Assembly, at its fifty-third session, of resolution 53/191, the Conference of the Parties agreed to facilitate a

consultative process for the elaboration of an additional regional implementation annex to the Convention for the countries of the Eastern and Central Europe region.

20. Countries of Eastern and Central Europe were invited to pursue consultations with a view to producing a draft additional regional implementation annex to the Convention, for consideration by the Conference of the Parties at its third session.

21. The Conference of the Parties, at its third session, invited the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and all Parties to the Convention to continue, under the auspices of the Bureau, the process of consultations on the draft additional implementation annex, with a view to adopting it at its fourth session.

I. Action by States

22. In paragraph 3 of resolution 54/223, the General Assembly called upon all countries that were not yet parties to the Convention to ratify or accede to it as soon as possible.

23. As of 15 June 2000, instruments of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession had been deposited by the European Community and the following 167 States: Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Comoros, Congo, Cook Islands, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Fiji, Finland, France, Gabon, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kiribati, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Micronesia (Federated States of), Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nauru, Nepal, Netherlands, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Niue, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Palau, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Rwanda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, San Marino, Sao Tome and Principe, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Togo, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Tuvalu, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

III. Arrangements for the fourth session

24. At the last meeting of its third session, the Conference of the Parties adopted decision 22/COP.3 by which it decided that the fourth session of the Conference would be held in Bonn, Germany, from 16 to 27 October 2000. Any offer from a Party to host the fourth session would be accommodated until 29 February 2000.

25. The Government of Australia expressed to the secretariat its interest in hosting the fourth session in Adelaide, by a notification dated 29 February 2000, and requested that the dates of the session be changed to 25 September-6 October 2000. The Bureau, at its first intersessional meeting, decided to accept the offer of Australia, with the new dates, and requested the Executive Secretary to enter into consultations with the Government for the organization of the session.

26. Unfortunately, on 30 May 2000, the Government of Australia informed the secretariat of difficulties it would face in hosting the session.

27. Consequently, the fourth session of the Conference of the Parties was rescheduled at the International Congress Centre Bundeshaus in Bonn. The Bureau and the secretariat were unable to book a facility there for the original dates; therefore the fourth session will be held from 11 to 22 December 2000. The Bureau is well aware of the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolution 52/445 and the difficulties that the December dates may present. The alternative would be not to hold a session of the

Conference in the year 2000, which is contrary to the provisions of the Convention. The Bureau is of the view that the importance of the Convention supersedes all calendar considerations.

IV. Action requested of the General Assembly

28. The General Assembly may wish to reiterate its appeal to the States that have not yet ratified the convention to do so as soon as possible.

29. In accordance with the institutional arrangements between the Conference of the Parties and the United Nations, the General Assembly may also wish to request the Secretary-General to include a provision in preparing the programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003 regarding the conference-servicing costs of the sixth session of the Conference of the Parties and its subsidiary bodies.

30. The General Assembly may further wish to consider requesting the views of the Conference of the Parties to the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21.